

Olaf M. Oleson's 1944 obituary in the Fort Dodge newspaper noted that "in 1938 a very unusual and really wonderful event took place here at the dedicatory ceremony at the band shell [above] in Oleson park, Mr. Oleson directed the Grieg Mandskor, which he organized, in a song, which he composed, in a park, which he donated to the city." Photographed here in 1939 by the WPA, the bandshell was designed by Iowa architect Henry L. Kamphoefner and is currently the focus of a local restoration project.

## Iowa Architect of Acoustics Designed Fort Dodge & Sioux City Bandshells

The Karl King Bandshell (*above*) in Fort Dodge's Oleson Park commemorates two of its musical citizens. Olaf M. Oleson (*see previous article*), who donated 64 acres for the park in 1905, was a mover and shaker in Norwegian men's choral singing on local and national levels. Karl King was a nationally recognized bandmaster, composer, and conductor. But this 1930s concrete bandshell also symbolizes significant changes in architecture and musical performance.

Bandshells like the one above were major departures from the small,

gazebo-like bandstands constructed in hundreds of American towns and cities after the Civil War. Although local bands were a staple of community life, bandstand styles varied enormously. Some were round, some square, some octagonal. Some were classical; others, rustic; many, heavy with millwork. Open on all sides so

the music could reach the listeners seated on surrounding benches or grass, the bandstand often occupied a convenient and central spot in a community—in a town square or park. Such bandstands could accommodate the 20 or so





musicians that made up the typical town band. Such a bandstand admittedly did not provide the best acoustics, but its "centerpiece" position on the late 19th-century town square signaled culture and civilization to both townspeople and visitors and bespoke the strong social role of the community band.

Even before the turn of the century, however, landscape architects were preferring placement of bandstands in more natural settings, by water and amid greenery. (In the years ahead, the distracting noise of automobiles around town-square bandstands would reinforce this argument.) After 1900, small, local bands were losing audiences to phonographs, radio, and jazz—as well as to the nationally touring bands that required more space, better acoustics, and a more formalized relationship to the audience. The gazebo-like bandstand form gradually gave way to the large bandshell, which directed the sound outward in one direction—some more successfully than others—towards an audience seated in rows. By the 1920s, older bandstands were falling into disrepair and disuse, and larger communities had hired architects to build shells.

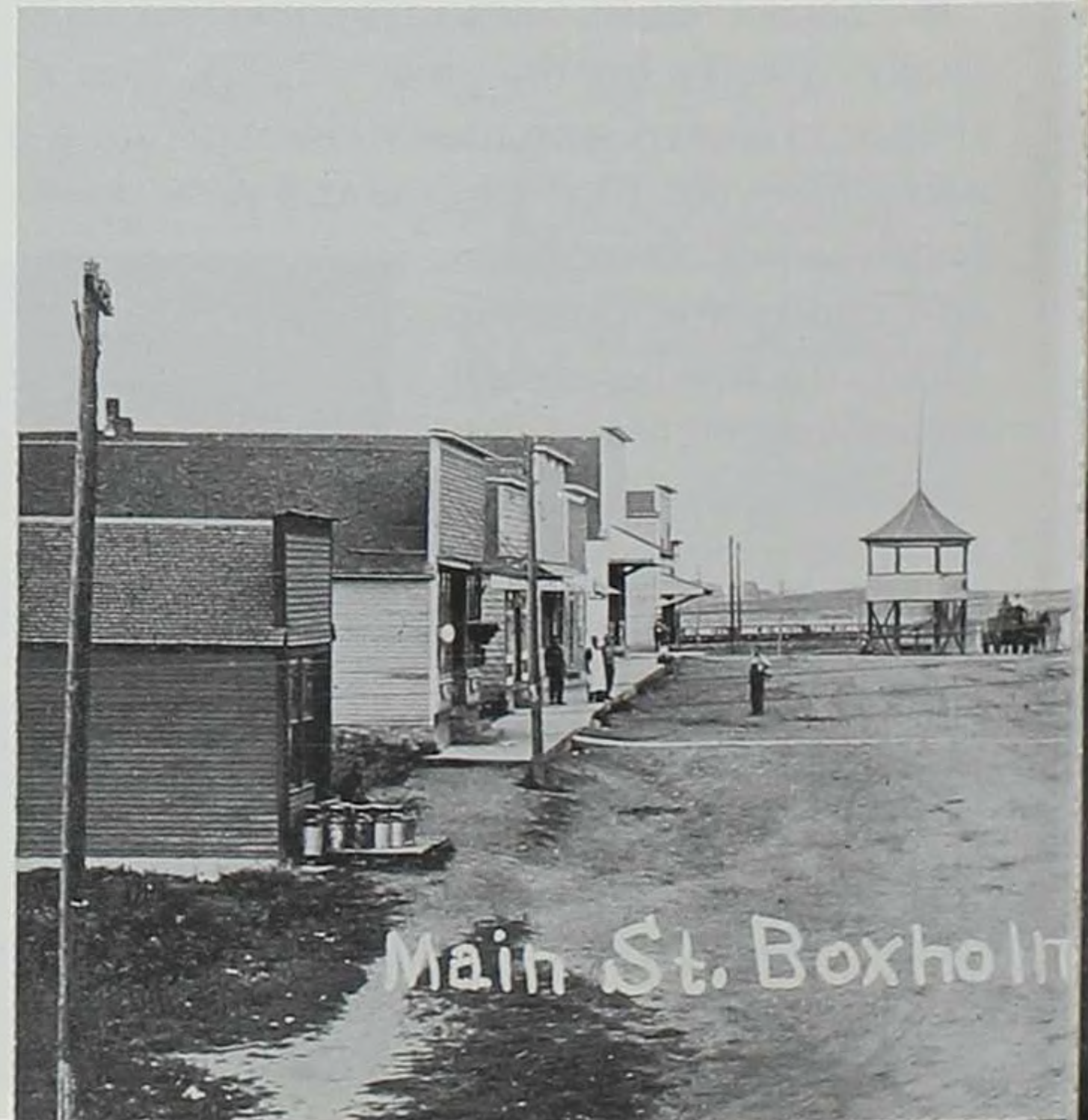
Although economic hard times scotched many community plans for bandshells, some were nevertheless built under 1930s New Deal programs. In this state, two were designed by Iowa architect Henry Kamphoefner, born in Des Moines in 1907 and educated at Morningside College in Sioux City. With architecture degrees from the University of Illinois and Columbia, Kamphoefner practiced in Sioux City during the 1930s and then left the state and shifted to teaching and administration—but not before he had designed the Grandview Music Pavilion in Sioux City (*above right*), and the Oleson Park Music Pavilion in Fort Dodge (*previous page*). Both were public works projects, and both were "created with the then most up-to-date methods of working in reinforced concrete," according to archi-

tectural historian Martha H. Bowers in a 1979 paper. "The two bandshells are variations on a single theme," she writes. "Both are essentially conic sections with concave inner surfaces, set on irregularly-shaped, deep platforms, and are wholly of reinforced concrete construction. The shells serve as covering over the performers and as collectors and reflectors of sound. The platforms on which they rest extend at the rear to form dressing rooms and storage spaces. . . . The bandshell at Sioux City is in a natural amphitheater, while the Fort Dodge shell is set on a relatively flat area of ground.

"In both bandshells, the architect kept decorative elements to a minimum," Bowers commented. "The form of each structure is a forthright articulation of its function, which is to reflect sound as evenly and as far as possible."

Bowers notes that "acoustical forms held Kamphoefner's interest even after he left Iowa." In 1945 in *Progressive Architecture* magazine, Kamphoefner criticized American bandshells built earlier in the century: "Many of the early sound shells were designed without even an elementary consideration for the simplest fundamentals of sound reflection. The ellipsoid shape was often used. That form reflected all sound from the stage to certain focal points in the audience areas, where a bedlam of raucous noise was heard. At certain points the drum might be emphasized, and at others, diminished. At other points the violin might not be heard at all."

Placement also concerned Kamphoefner, and he used a small bandshell in Ackley, Iowa, to exemplify "the typical ostentation of the small town in placing the shell where it can be seen by every tourist and traveling salesman who passes through the village." Echoing earlier landscape architects, he preferred bandshell placement in "a quiet portion of an isolated public park, away from the noise and confusion of the town, where



ALL PHOTOS: SHS (IOWA CITY)



Designed by Kamphoefner and built during the Depression, the Sioux City Grandview Park bandshell became a reality thanks to federal and state emergency relief programs and local funds. As the town newspaper acknowledged, this bandshell, "beautiful in its simplicity and powerful in its utility" evolved from "inspiration, hope, courage, artistry, pride, enthusiasm, ambition, labor, management and of course, the necessary funds."



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Sioux City unveiled its bandshell in a week of public performances in late May 1935. The *Sioux City Journal* described "the white band shell studding a cup shaped greensward" as "nature's loveliness accentuated by man's creation." When the band of the local Monahan American Legion post (which had labored to make the bandshell a reality) opened the dedication, the audience of 5,000 had immediate evidence that the acoustics were just right. "Every note was heard in its true tone," the *Journal* noted, "the shell reflecting the music accurately and powerfully over and beyond the crest of the cup shaped bowl." Later in the week, the performance of

Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, "seldom performed out of doors," the *Journal* added, "was another tribute to the exceptional acoustics of the music pavilion. Solo as well as choral selections were audible even above the highest tiers of seats in the amphitheater."

Today Kamphoefner's bandshells in Fort Dodge and Sioux City are local landmarks. And both continue to project the spirited sounds of summer band concerts and other performances outward to audiences who appreciate the pleasures of live music under Iowa skies.

—by Ginalie Swaim, editor

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In the 19th and early 20th century, small bandstands like these were often centrally located in town parks or squares. From left: bandstands in Polk City, Boxholm, and Calmar, Iowa.



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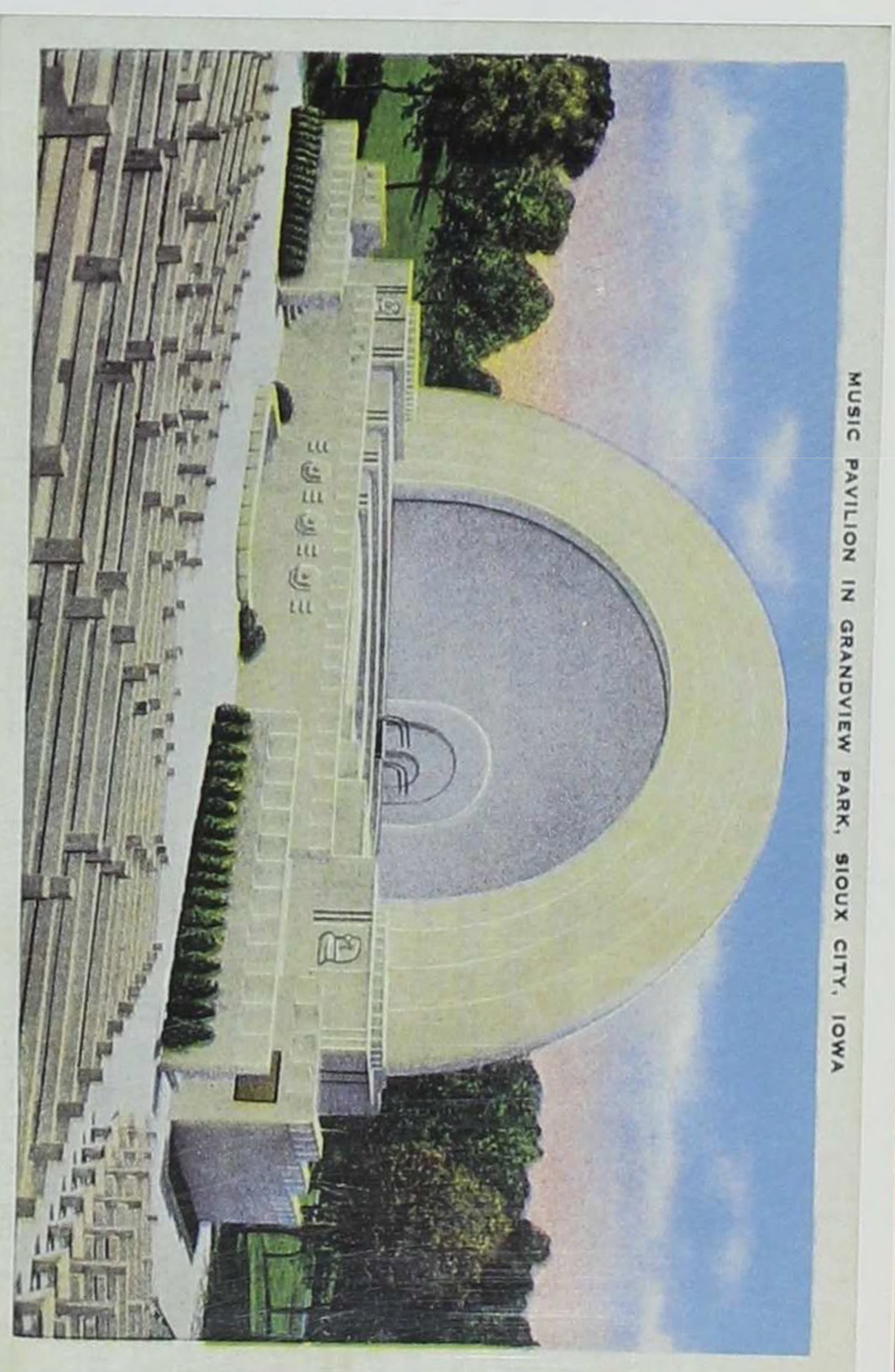
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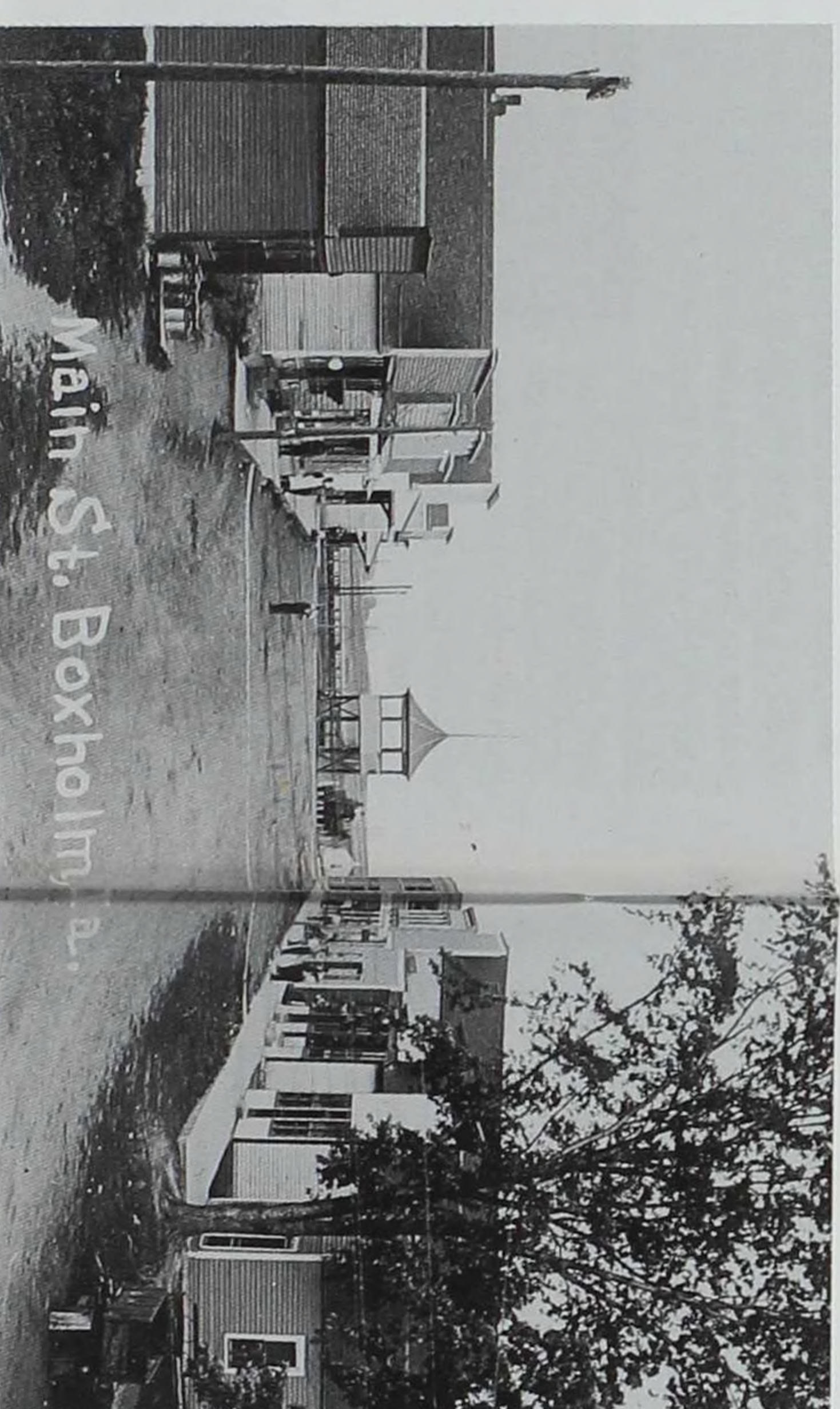
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